

## Smokey makes a slam-dunk at preseason opener for Denver Nuggets

*Posted by Phil DeSennze, Rocky Mountain Region, U.S. Forest Service*

The National Basketball Association's Denver Nuggets honored U.S. Forest Service Hotshot crews and first responders throughout the state of Colorado at a recent Fans and Heroes Night at the Pepsi Center in Denver.

The U.S. Forest Service participated in activities before, during and after the game with Smokey Bear attending his first NBA game in Colorado. Smokey encouraged fans to be prepared for emergencies and gave two big "paws up" to the men and women who serve their communities as first responders.

Before the game, Smokey and Forest Service employees greeted fans of all ages and provided giveaways and information about emergency preparedness and wildfire prevention. Emergency vehicles were on display, including a fire engine from the Pike National Forest. Emergency responders and children took their picture with Smokey. The Nuggets gave first responders and their friends and family complimentary and discounted tickets to the game. Pictures of first responders in action were displayed during game breaks on the Pepsi Center's new high-definition JumboTron, while law enforcement, firefighters and medical professionals were recognized throughout the night. Three Forest Service public service announcements also played during the game.

Smokey made his rounds during the game and even took the court with Rocky, the Nuggets' mascot. Captain Drew Maxwell from the Pike National Forest took part in the color guard before the game and presented the game ball to the referees. Bob Ayotte and Mike Alexander, Hotshots from the Pike National Forest, displayed their fitness with a push-up competition at center court during a timeout in the third quarter. Fans and players looked on in amazement as these Hotshots did almost 40 push-ups in 30 seconds, displaying the level of preparation it takes to belong to the ranks of these elite first responders. *"This event provided an outstanding opportunity for us to interact with an urban population and help spread Smokey Bear's fire prevention, fire safety and outdoor opportunity messages,"* said Alexander, assistant superintendent of the Pike Interagency Hotshot Crew.

Thousands of fans stayed after the game to participate in an evacuation drill in cooperation with the Denver City Police and Fire departments. Participants received prize packs, which included regular season tickets and autographed memorabilia, along with emergency preparedness kits. The event was a great opportunity to create a new partnership with the Nuggets and first responders throughout the state, as well as build awareness among the community about the importance of fire prevention.



*Top: Smokey, Denver Nuggets mascot Rocky, and the Nuggets' cheerleaders, cheer on Pike Interagency Hotshot Crew members, Michael Alexander and Bob Ayotte in a push-up competition at center court.*

*Smokey waves to the crowd at pre-season opener with Nuggets mascot Rocky at center court.*

*(photos: U.S. Forest Service/Todd Riecks)*

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COLORADO: Arapaho Roosevelt NF & Pawnee NG • Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, & Gunnison NFs  
 Pike-San Isabel National Forests and Cimarron-Comanche NFs • Rio Grande NF • San Juan NF • White River NF  
 NEBRASKA: Nebraska & Samuel R. McKelvie NFs • SOUTH DAKOTA: Black Hills NF  
 WYOMING: Bighorn NF • Medicine Bow-Routt NFs & Thunder Basin NG • Shoshone NF

